

Firefighters And Students Together  
(A mentoring program for at-risk youth)

Strategic Management of Change

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper reviewed the at-risk youth mentoring program, known as Firefighters and Students Together (F.A.S.T.) The F.A.S.T. program is a collaboration between the Aurora Fire Department and the Aurora Public School District. Firefighters volunteer to mentor at-risk high school students under the direction of the Gateway High School counseling office. The problem at the school was keeping students in school until graduation and helping the students make positive choices with their lives.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the F.A.S.T. program and make recommendations as to how to get and keep firefighters involved in the program.

The method used for this research was descriptive in nature. The F.A.S.T. program was examined from inception to the present. The research questions answered by this study were:

1. Does the Aurora Public School District feel that the F.A.S.T. program positively benefited the students who participated?
2. Do the Aurora Firefighters involved in the program feel that the program was of positive benefit to the students?
3. Do the firefighter mentors wish to continue with the program?
4. Is this type of program supported by other fire agencies in the area?

The results of the research showed that the program was of value and had been instrumental in keeping 64 at-risk students in school to graduate. The firefighter mentors were, however, showing signs of burn out and many had quite the program. Key issues for the mentors were lack of compensation for their efforts and lack of support by fire administration.

The recommendations to keep the program viable were to get a funding source that would compensate the firefighter mentors. Until this is a reality, the fire department needs to committ to the program by allowing the mentors on-duty time to go to the school. The school district and department must work together to make the F.A.S.T. program as productive as possible. The program has been successful.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Aurora Fire Department is a fully-paid, metro-sized department located in the eastern portion of the greater Denver metropolitan area. There are 300 firefighters staffing ten fire stations, and 50 civilian employees who work in fire prevention and codes, communications and dispatch, and fire administration. In 1993 a public education bureau was added to the Life Safety Division of the department and was staffed by 3 firefighters. Initially, the bureau was established to address public safety education in the schools. The focus was to be on the elementary grades. The fire department adopted the *Learn Not To Burn* curriculum from the National Fire Protection Association and purchased a fire safety trailer to enhance safety education. A comprehensive kindergarten through fifth grade program was established and implemented in the 1994 school year. During this same time frame, at-risk youth issues in the Aurora high schools had become a significant issue and the senior dropout rate had reached an alarming level. The juvenile crime rate was increasing and adolescent suicide was on the rise in the Denver Metro area.

The Aurora Fire Department was asked to be part of a mentoring effort to address at-risk youth. In 1994 a program called F.A.S.T. was established. The acronym stands for *Firefighters and Students Together*. This program would place at-risk students, in their last two years of high school, with firefighter mentors who would become long term positive role models and counsel them concerning life choices and the at-risk behavior they were involved in. The overall goal was to keep the students in high school until graduation.

The program is presently in its fourth year and has been successful in reducing the dropout rate of the students who have participated in the program. The key issue is that the department is having difficulty in getting firefighters to volunteer and/or stay with the program. In 1996 there were seven firefighter mentors involved in the program and in 1998 there are only two remaining. There have been no new volunteers since 1996 and the number of students involved in the program has had to be reduced from a high of 45 per year to 16 presently. The Aurora School District is allotted \$4000 per student per

year by the State of Colorado and 64 students who have been part of the F.A.S.T. Program have stayed in school and have graduated.

Volunteer mentoring, using Aurora firefighters, is not generating enough mentors to meet the needs of the F.A.S.T. program. The program is time intensive, requiring an average of four to six hours per week of the firefighter's time. At the close of the 1997 school year the program had mentored 148 at-risk youth and had successfully kept 64 in school through graduation or the attainment of a G.E.D. The Aurora School District realized a savings of approximately \$256,000 dollars during this time period by having these students remain in school.

The purpose of this applied research project is to evaluate the F.A.S.T. Program and to make recommendations as to how to get and keep firefighter mentors involved in working with at-risk youth in the Aurora high school.

The method used for this research is descriptive in nature. The F.A.S.T. Program is examined from its inception to the present school year; and a description of the manner in which it functions is addressed. Two different surveys were utilized to evaluate this program. One was internal and was designed to evaluate the acceptance and participation of the Aurora firefighters in the F.A.S.T. Program. The other survey was external and was sent to fire agencies along the front range of Colorado who actively participate in public education and community relations programs.

The research questions to be answered by this study are:

1. Does the Aurora Public School District feel that the F.A.S.T. program positively benefited the at-risk students who participated?
2. Do the Aurora firefighters involved in the F.A.S.T. program feel that the program was of positive benefit to the students?
3. Do the firefighter mentors wish to continue with the program?
4. Is this type of program supported by other fire agencies in the area?

## BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The high school dropout rate for the Aurora Public School District had reached an alarming 16% in 1993 (APS Annual Report, 1993). The school district serves a student population of over 11,000 students in four high schools. The average senior class was 490 students in each of the four schools. Gateway High School is located in the middle of the district and covers a diverse area in terms of socio-economics and ethnicity. This particular high school had a dropout rate of 18% and had experienced teen suicide, pregnancies, and drug use.

Juvenile crime was increasing at this time and gang activity was rampant in the older section of the city. The city and school district had begun a joint project to address youth violence and crime. The project was called the *Spirit of Aurora* and funded by a local grant from the Aurora Education Foundation and a state grant from the Colorado Department of Public Safety. This project initially utilized staff from the Aurora Police Department and the Aurora Recreation Department. The program goals were intervention with at-risk youth and productive and positive leisure time activities (City of Aurora Annual Report, 1994). School gymnasiums were opened on nights and weekends with a focus on team sports, arts, and crafts. The at-risk youth component was established in the high school and middle schools located in north Aurora and a police officer was assigned to each school as a Police Area Representative (PAR). The goal of the PAR Officer was to reduce adolescent violence and open a channel for communication with students to discuss problems of at-risk behavior. The reality of the situation became apparent when crimes at school were reduced, but few students would interact with the police officers. Gateway High School took the lead in the district and opted to look at alternatives for assisting at-risk youth. Other community volunteers such as big brothers and big sisters were considered but the resources of this organization were already spread very thin throughout the Aurora community and they had not been successful in dealing with older adolescents. A viable solution to mentor older youth was desperately needed.

Fire crews from the surrounding fire stations had been doing fire inspections and going on emergency runs and false alarms since Gateway High School had opened in 1976. Over the years the

school administration and many of the school staff had gotten to know the firefighters. The high school principal contacted his Police Area Representative (PAR) officer and discussed the possibility of requesting fire department involvement in a mentoring program. The request was made to fire administration and volunteers were asked to try a pilot mentoring program for at-risk youth. One volunteer, Firefighter Michael Roberts, initially came forward and was trained by the high school counseling staff and by the PAR officer to assist with the at-risk youth mentoring program. He was successful in getting three other firefighters to also volunteer. Firefighters were perceived by the adolescents as friends and someone to be trusted simply by their demeanor and the nature of their profession. Firefighters in general are seen as helpful and non-threatening and the volunteers were genuinely interested in helping juveniles deal with issues. The program was given the name *Firefighters And Students Together* (F.A.S.T.) and was implemented in the 1994 school year.

The F.A.S.T. program started at Gateway High School in Aurora, Colorado, and was established under the counseling department. The principal of the school, Dr. Kenneth Vedra became the primary contact person, and Firefighter Michael Roberts was the fire department coordinator. There were 22 students initially assigned to the firefighters. Four to six hours per week of the firefighter's time was to be the average amount of time spent with students. The fire department agreed to allow firefighters to go to the school while on duty if sufficient staffing was available as to not cause overtime or take away from mandatory training. The firefighters were given pagers to wear and each student was given the number of his or her mentor. The average was five students per firefighter, with Firefighter Roberts taking the additional two. The students were selected by school counselors. All the students were carrying lower than a 2.0 grade average and most had at least one prior misdemeanor municipal or district court conviction. The students ranged from 16 to 19 years of age and were a mix of both males and females. All students had truancy issues, some on a regular basis. Dr. Vedra had suspended five of the students for various school rule infractions in the previous school year and two were on the verge of expulsion if there was another infraction.

The firefighter mentors worked with their students and reported to the counseling officers on a monthly basis. The students were told to expect confidentiality from their mentors with the exception of reports of criminal behavior, abuse or suicidal threats.

The program was initially met with skepticism from the union and operations personnel. Statements such as " I didn't become a firefighter to be a kids counselor" or " we're in the emergency service business not social services" were common statements firefighters were making (Roberts, personal conversation, January 1998).

The program did, however, meet with success and by the end of the first school year, 12 of the students had stayed in school and had met graduation requirements. The Aurora School District felt that the program was on target and reaped a monetary benefit of \$48,000 from the state for students who stayed in school . The F.A.S.T. program was officially adopted by the department and set for the future. In August of 1995, Firefighter Michael Roberts was reassigned from the operations division of the fire department to the public education bureau . This assignment was for 20 months, the length of two school years, and Firefighter Roberts was given the objective of expanding the program to accommodate up to 45 students at Gateway High School. The existing four mentors all agreed to stay with the program as volunteers for the 1995 school year and each offered to expand the number of students to six . This would require at least three more mentors to reach the desired ratio. The local firefighters union was asked to consider a sponsorship based on the first year's success and the fact that a majority of the mentors were also union members. Both fire administration and the local firefighter union saw the public relations potential that this program could generate and a cohesive approach could result in a win-win situation for both entities.

Three additional firefighter volunteered to be mentors and a formalized training class was created by the high school counseling department. The F.A.S.T. program received additional funding of approximately \$5000 to allow for a three day outward bound style team work/skill building class for both the students and mentors. The second year of the program again met with success and 19 of the 45 students finished high school by either graduating or receiving a G.E.D. One of the mentors quit the program during the year stating that the students needs were too overwhelming. His family complained



about the late night calls and he, personally, was not prepared to deal with teen drug use and pregnancy. The school reaped a monetary benefit of \$76,000 during the year by having the students stay in school. Over the summer months a recruiting effort was put in place by the fire department in an attempt to get additional volunteers, but the efforts were unsuccessful and the 1996 school year was met with 45 students and only six mentors.

The budget for the city, and consequently the fire department, was limited and additional funding for the program was not available. The mentors were forced to primarily use their own time to volunteer at the school with students, putting an additional strain on those involved. In December of 1996 at the Colorado State Public Safety Awards, Dr. Vedra and Firefighter Roberts received the Leadership Award in Public Safety . By the end of the school year the program had again met with success and 18 students finished school and graduated saving the high school over \$72,000. There was, however, another obstacle when another mentor quit the program due to a promotion and a requirement to attend paramedic school. At the same time, Firefighter Roberts asked to be reassigned back to firefighting duties citing family illness. He agreed to continue to coordinate the program and mentor on a weekly basis.

An interesting side note occurred in 1997 when, with only 5 mentors and no daily coordination, the program handled 36 students and successfully graduated 15. The school again realized a financial gain of \$60,000. Firefighter Roberts was awarded the Union Firefighter of the year for 1997, recognizing his continued commitment to F.A.S.T. A letter was submitted by Dr. Vedra citing the significant accomplishments of the F.A.S.T. Program through 1997. The school district has saved \$256,000, which it received from the State of Colorado, by graduating 64 students who were at-risk and would have dropped out without the benefit of mentoring. Dr. Vedra further states that two of the students are presently attending community college and two others are attending Colorado universities where they have increased their opportunities for success in a changing world (Vedra, 1997).

The 1997 to 1998 school year will be a very challenging time for the program. There are only two active mentors and eighteen students in the program although the need for the program has not decreased. The eighteen students are considered to be the most at-risk as established by counselors at

the school. It is the intent of this research to evaluate the program and make recommendations for possible improvements in keeping firefighter mentors involved.

The National Fire Academy Class, Strategic Management of Change, deals with the concepts of “Leading Change”,(SCS-IV Leading Change Plan(1)). The problems and issues confronting the youth of today are complex and can be life threatening . The choices they make are critical to their futures and, in some cases, their very survival. For youth who have not had the benefits of strong, positive parental guidance the odds of making poor life choices increase. The proactive approach to mentoring students certainly qualifies as leading change and the fire service is an excellent example of positive role modeling. Firefighters who choose to be mentors are a great resource to the school and serve the community in the tradition of protecting life and property in a unique and productive way. Mentoring and positive role model behavior are the primary methods used to foster change.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring youth is not a new concept. The needs of adolescents have changed and the youth of today are faced with challenges of violence, abuse, gang activity, and drug use at an unprecedented level. Maxine Womble, director for the Midwest Regional Center for Drug Free Schools and Communities, stated that

“over the past ten years a small but growing cadre of professionals in the field of prevention has been promoting the notion that prevention of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use among young people involves much more than just educating them about the negative consequences of using substances.” (Womble, 1994, p. 4).

The focus has shifted to dealing with behavior and in many cases the youth are making choices which place them in significant danger. Effective prevention programs must look at the diverse needs of the individual and therefore, the approaches used must be comprehensive. An approach that sets multiple strategies and activities focused on developing youth from a social, physical, and psychological base as well as an educational perspective should not fail. “If young people are offered alternative opportunities to grow and develop into productive citizens, they will be less inclined to engage in negative behaviors”, is the message Maxine Womble conveys in the Midwest Forum (Womble, 1994, p. 3).

Mentoring programs that stress the bonding of two individuals provide an opportunity for an intergenerational transfer of knowledge and experience, which can be extremely helpful to young people are the cornerstone of the message from Cornelia Blanchette, the Associate Director of Education and Employment Issues. Ms. Blanchette was asked to testify before the Subcommittee on Youth Violence and discussed at-risk and delinquent youth. When asked to define the term “at-risk”, Ms. Blanchette gave the following definition: “At-risk youth, in the broad sense, refers to youths who, because of certain characteristics or experiences, are statistically more likely to encounter certain problems, such as legal, social, financial, educational, emotional and health.” (Blanchette, 1997, p. 6). When asked to rank the

issues of at-risk youth, Ms. Blanchette simply stated that more federal dollars were spent on substance abuse and violence prevention programs, but felt that the existing programs on a federal level “lacked a coordinated effort.” (Blanchette, 1997, p. 7).

The effectiveness of substance abuse prevention programs has identified two approaches for at-risk youth. The first approach is referred to as the psychosocial approach and emphasizes improving the individual’s problem solving/decision making skills. The goal of modifying attitudes and norms that encourage drug use are examined and positive attributes are encouraged. This is the purpose of a program such as F.A.S.T.

The second approach is referred to as the comprehensive approach and involves the coordinated use of multiple societal institution. Examples of these institutions are the family, community, and school. Both approaches have shown success in reducing drug use and the ability to resist drugs in both short and longer term programs (Blanchette, 1997).

At-risk youth in Aurora, Colorado, have not been ignored. The need however, is greater than the available resources. All of the high schools in the city offer some counseling through their psychological services offices, but can only address issues on a short term basis and lack the staff to fully meet the needs of all students. “Funding for education is always difficult and grant dollars are getting harder to come by” is the sentiment of Cynthia Harding, a grants specialist and educator in Aurora (Harding, 1996). Even the private education sector is feeling the effects of more students in need of mentoring. A program called *Special Friends* has been established at the Excelsior Youth Center for Girls. This private school handles at-risk adolescent girls. The staff is well trained and the student to teacher ratio is much lower than found in most public schools. They are presently utilizing volunteer mentors from the community. “The girls we have at our school have special needs and the mentors who get involved are a real benefit because they want to make a difference” according to Joan Gabrielson, the associate director of Excelsior (Gabrielson, 1995, p. 18). *Special Friends* requires a one-year commitment from their volunteer mentors and uses the psychological counseling staff to assist in training and advising the mentors.

Many factors influence why some young people have success in life and why others have a harder time. Economic circumstances, genetics, trauma, and other factors play a role. These factors, though difficult to change, are not all that matters. The Search Institute has done research which has led to the identification of forty concrete, developmental assets that have a tremendous influence on adolescents. Their research shows that developmental assets help young people, “make wise decisions, choose positive paths, and grow up competent, caring, and responsible” (Search Institute, 1997). The assets are grouped into eight categories. These are Support, Empowerment, Boundaries, Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity. The asset framework is a framework that includes families, schools, neighborhoods, congregations, and all organizations in the community. (Search Institute, 1997). The Cherry Creek School District in the south metro area of Denver, Colorado, has adopted the Assets Program and has a campaign called *Wrap Your Arms Around Cherry Creek Kids*. This program is promoted from elementary through high school and is meeting with success. The communities surrounding the Cherry Creek School District have also embraced this program’s philosophy and asset building for youth is a priority. This is a more affluent school district than the Aurora School District, but the principles would apply to at-risk youth. This framework is similar to a portion of what the firefighter mentors do in the F.A.S.T. program at Gateway High School. Firefighter mentors address the areas of empowerment, constructive use of time, positive values and positive identity when working with at risk youth. It is apparent from the literature that successful mentoring programs for youth combine caring and commitment from the mentors with a willingness to make every effort to succeed from the students involved.

## PROCEDURES

### DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS:

<u>Mentor</u>	A trusted counselor or guide. A firefighter volunteer who is counseling at-risk youth.
<u>At-Risk Youth</u>	Refers to youth who, because of certain characteristics or experiences, are statistically more likely to encounter serious problems as they mature from adolescence to adulthood.
<u>F.A.S.T.</u>	Firefighters and Students Together. Name of program for mentoring at-risk youth in Aurora School District high schools.

The procedures utilized in arriving at the results of this research included a literature review of mentoring and at-risk youth programs. Interviews and surveys of Aurora F.A.S.T. firefighter volunteer participants, management, and union officers, was conducted as well as a survey of fire agencies located along the front range of Colorado for participation in at-risk youth programs.

The internal survey (Appendix A) was sent to 60 Aurora firefighters who had participated in the F.A.S.T. Program at some level. This included past and present mentors, management, and union officers who were involved in the collaboration for sponsorship of the F.A.S.T. Program. Thirty-six of the sixty internal surveys were returned for a 60% return rate. The survey asked 12 questions.

Questions 1 and 2, Name and Assignment, were optional.

Question 3 asked if the person was familiar with the program and the purpose of F.A.S.T. All 36 respondents answered 'yes.'

Question 4 asked if the person was presently working with the program. Two responded 'yes' and thirty-four responded 'no.'

Question 5 asked if presently involved, how much time are you committing to the program per month. One respondent answered with 20 hours and one answered with 8 hours, for an average of 14 hours per person.

Question 6 asked if the person had previously been involved with the F.A.S.T. program. Ten respondents answered 'yes'; twenty-five answered 'no'; and one left the question blank.

Question 7 asked how much time had been committed per month if the person had been previously involved. The responses ranged from 8 to 22 hours per week; the average was 12 hours per month.

Question 8 asked why a previously involved person had discontinued their involvement. The answers varied, and included: lack of time and personal commitment; family responsibilities; return to college; too much responsibility; kids were very needy--more than I bargained for. Seven responses indicated little support from administration as a cause.

Question 9 asked if the person still had an interest in F.A.S.T. Eleven respondents answered 'yes' and twenty-five responded 'no.'

Question 10 asked if the respondent felt that the F.A.S.T. program had been supported by administration. Twenty-two answered 'yes' and fourteen answered 'no.'

Question 11 asked if the respondent felt that this was a worthwhile program for firefighters and students. Twenty-seven answered 'yes' and 9 answered 'no.'

Question 12 asked if the respondent would like additional information regarding the F.A.S.T. Program. Thirty-four of those returning the survey said 'no' and two said 'yes.'

Additional comments were asked for and all responses fell into a negative category. Examples of these comments are:

1. Why are we involved in this type of high-risk activity? This is not fire related.
2. I would consider doing F.A.S.T. if I were compensated for my time.
3. If this program was so important, the Public Education Bureau would do it exclusively.

4. I'm tired of going on my time--I can't get off while on duty to go on regular basis. I'm frustrated!
5. The school district should pay to have firefighters mentor the students.
6. Union and management do not support the program; they only offer lip service.
7. Hiring more counselors would help--not volunteer mentors. Kids need professional help.

The external survey (Appendix B) was sent to 28 front range fire agencies where 80% of the state's population is located.. These agencies comprise the membership of the Fire Safety Educators of Colorado. All of the agencies reporting were either partially paid or fully paid professional fire departments or districts. Nineteen of twenty-eight agencies returned the survey for a response rate of 68%.

There were ten questions asked in this survey. The first five questions in the survey requested background information on the agency; department name, contact person, phone and fax numbers, number of personnel in department and in public education. Question 6 asked if the department currently had any programs that dealt with at-risk youth in schools. Three agencies responded 'yes' and fifteen responded 'no.'

Question 6 was the key question. If the answer was 'no', the department was asked to explain why and to return the survey. If they answer was 'yes' they were asked to respond to the remainder of the questions.

Question 7 asked what their program specifically addressed. The three 'yes' answers all described programs for juvenile arson/fire setters. One also added classes on safety for Boy Scouts and youth groups.

Question 8 asked how the department measured the success of their program. All measured it by the number of students going through the program and the recidivism of firesetting behaviors by offenders.



Question 9 requested information on how the programs were staffed. The answers indicated staffing was done with on-line firefighters and public education staff as needed. a direct result of Fire Fighter mentoring.

The final question, Question 10, asked how their programs were funded. Answers showed that the funding was done by the department and federal grants for arson awareness. No comments were recorded concerning funding of at-risk youth in mentoring programs. From the surveys returned, it appears that no other fire agency in the front range area of Colorado has a program for at-risk youth similar to F.A.S.T.

The limitations of the procedures followed in this research are primarily with the external survey. The survey of fire agencies located along the front range of Colorado may have been too limited in scope. This area covers the largest population in Colorado and, subsequently, the ten largest departments in the state; a survey of similar size departments with like needs on a national basis would have yielded more extensive data and possibly programs similar to the F.A.S.T. Program. The internal survey of Aurora firefighters met with better success. The firefighters who returned the survey were indicative of those members of the department who are proactive and participate in the organization beyond their required job description. The negative comments made on the surveys were disconcerting; however, they were of value in considering the satisfaction of firefighters who participate in job-related volunteer activities.

## RESULTS

1. Does the Aurora Public School District feel that the F.A.S.T. Program positively benefited the at-risk students who participated?

The answer is “yes.” Dr. Vedra, Gateway High School Principal, cites four examples of great success by previous participants in the program. Four students have not only graduated from Gateway High School, but have gone on to community and Colorado colleges and universities. They have set goals and are moving forward in their lives as a result of having been mentored and going through the F.A.S.T. Program. Having sixty-four students stay in school and graduate is a success on a personal and monetary level for the school district.

2. Do the Aurora firefighters involved in the F.A.S.T. Program feel that the program was of positive benefit to the students?

The answer is “yes.” The firefighters who have served as mentors have all felt that the program was worthwhile and those students they mentored who stayed in school and graduated attest to the positive results that both the student and the mentor achieved.

3. Do firefighter mentors wish to continue with the program?

The answer to this question is not clear. It is both “yes” and “no” depending on the perspective and experience of the specific mentor.

Those mentors who are presently involved do wish to stay with the program. Several of the past mentors also would come back and work with F.A.S.T., but would only do so if the following criteria were met:

- Firefighters were given “on-duty” time to go to the school and mentor students.
- A mechanism for paying firefighter mentors for their personal time was put in place to compensate them.

- The administration of the fire department made the F.A.S.T. Program a priority and acknowledged the success achieved by the program in conjunction with the school and the firefighter mentors.
- Several former mentors would not return under any condition. The program was not sufficiently rewarding to them.

4. Is this type of program supported by other fire agencies in the area?

The answer is “no.” There are no other programs located along the front range of Colorado that address at-risk youth from a mentoring standpoint. No other fire agencies are in collaboration with the high school districts to keep at-risk students in school and graduating. Sixty-four students graduated from Gateway High School as a result of participating in the F.A.S.T. Program. The Aurora School District saved \$256,000 as a direct result of firefighter mentoring.

## **DISCUSSION**

Mentoring of at-risk youth is a noble cause. The fact that firefighters would volunteer for a program of this nature and ultimately be successful in keeping students in high school through graduation is remarkable. It attests to the positive nature one-on-one relationships and the need for positive role models. Sixty-four Aurora high school students turned their lives around with the assistance and guidance of the firefighter mentors. The Aurora School District saved over \$256,000 by having these students stay in school and graduate. Congressman James McCrery of Louisiana states that mentoring at-risk youth is a “win-win situation” (McCrery, 1997). Results from the U.S. Department of Justice Juvenile Mentoring Program (J.U.M.P.) have assisted Louisiana youth. This program is new and Louisiana is the first to get a J.U.M.P. grant of \$200,000. It is the hope of Congressman McCrery that adolescents who have poor attendance records, have few positive family influences, and are at risk to use drugs or alcohol, will be helped by J.U.M.P. (McCrery, 1997).

The Volunteers of America have been selected as the agency to recruit and train volunteer mentors on a national level. The program is still being created with components that will include group activities, school athletics, and individual interests. For 1999, approximately \$10,000,000 will be made available from federal grants to be administered by the Volunteers of America (Volunteers of America, 1997).

The F.A.S.T. Program is very similar to what the J.U.M.P. programs hope to be. Perhaps when the Volunteers of America have established the criteria to receive the grant dollars, the Aurora Fire Department F.A.S.T. Program can be a recipient.

The results of the Aurora firefighter survey and comments clearly state that financial support is necessary to keep the program viable. The requests and demands placed on volunteer mentors for their time create immense hardships on the mentors and their families. Compensation in the form of either time off from their normal job, or a monetary stipend, is often stated when asking for suggestions to improve at-risk youth mentoring programs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The F.A.S.T at-risk youth mentoring program is in trouble and has difficulty in recruiting and retaining firefighter mentors. A majority of the mentors have left the program over the past four years. From a high of seven mentors and a coordinator to the present two mentors, one functioning as the coordinator, the program is dying. The students need the program, but to continue as it is today is not viable. Only sixteen students can be in the program with the two mentors, and it is unknown if any will graduate in 1998. The firefighter volunteer mentors are reaching burnout and the program will fail without intervention.

The F.A.S.T. Program needs to be funded to get and keep mentors. This funding can come from a combination of sources. The Aurora Education Foundation has assisted with dollars for activities,

e.g. team building. The J.U.M.P. Program dollars from the Department of Justice, and Volunteers of America grant dollars when available will be pursued. Until this source is established; however, the Aurora Fire Department must provide assistance. This assistance could be in the form of allowing firefighter mentors to go to the school while on duty. The staffing issue for allowing this to take place will require a commitment to cover the position of the mentor while engaged in working with the students. A set schedule would assist both the school district and the department in making this time commitment a reality.

The F.A.S.T. Program is worth making an on-going success. If the school district and fire department work together, all parties can and will reap the fruits of this endeavor.

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**APPENDIX A****AURORA FIRE DEPARTMENT  
PUBLIC EDUCATION BUREAU  
INTERNAL SURVEY**

This survey is being conducted to determine involvement and interest in the F.A.S.T. program.

1. (Optional) Name of person filling out this survey \_\_\_\_\_
2. (Optional) Assignment of person filling out this survey \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you familiar with the program and the purpose of Firefighters and Students Together (F.A.S.T.) for at risk youth mentoring? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

4. Are you presently involved in this program? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_
5. If presently involved, how much time are you committing to the program per month?
6. Have you previously been involved in the F.A.S.T. program?
7. If previously involved, how much time did you commit per month?
8. If previously involved, why did you discontinue your involvement?

## F.A.S.T. Internal Survey (continued)

9. Do you still have an interest in F.A.S.T.? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

Comments:

10. Do you feel that the F.A.S.T. program has been supported by administration?  
Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
If "No", why?

Recommendation:

11. Do you feel that this is a worthwhile program for the firefighters and students?  
Yes\_\_\_\_ No.\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_  
Would you like to receive additional information concerning the F.A.S.T.  
program? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

Additional comments:

Please return this survey to Fire Marshal Doug McBee, at headquarters, no later than March 31, 1998. You may return this survey by fax to 303-739-7566 or by inter-department mail.

Thank you very much for taking for taking the time to assist us by filling out this survey.



**APPENDIX B****AURORA FIRE DEPARTMENT  
PUBLIC EDUCATION/AT RISK YOUTH SURVEY**

1. Name of fire department \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name and rank of contact person \_\_\_\_\_
3. Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Fax Number \_\_\_\_\_
4. Number of personnel in fire department/district \_\_\_\_\_
5. Number of personnel employed in public education \_\_\_\_\_
6. Does your department currently have any programs which deal with at risk youth in schools?      Yes      No \_\_\_\_\_  
  
If "No", why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please stop at this point and return survey. Thank you very much for your assistance.)  
  
If "Yes", what grade levels are addressed?
7. What, specifically, does your program address?
8. How do you measure the success of this program.
9. How do you staff these types of programs?
10. How is the program funded?

Please return this survey to Fire Marshal Doug McBee at the Aurora Fire Department, FAX Number 303-739-7566, no later than March 31, 1998.

Thank you very much for taking the time to help us with this survey.